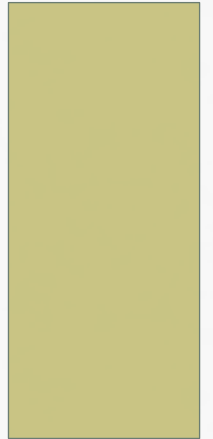


HOW GEOGRAPHY CAN SHAPE HISTORY

THE STORY OF HARRODS CREEK, KENTUCKY



WHY DID A COMMUNITY GROW HERE?

- Have you ever wondered why communities grow in some places and not in others?
- What makes them change over time?
- Geography has a lot to do with it!
- Let's consider the history of the Harrods Creek community.

The Harrods Creek community is located where Harrods Creek joins the Ohio River just north of Louisville.



Looking north on Duroc Avenue from River Road. Source: CULTURAL HISTORIC ASSESSMENT OF THE BASS-SHIRLEY SANITARY SEWER AND DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, LOUISVILLE, JEFFERSON COUNTY, KENTUCKY

THE OHIO RIVER

- The Ohio River begins where two rivers come together in Pennsylvania. It flows 981 miles, forming the northern border of West Virginia and Kentucky and the southern border of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois before it joins the Mississippi River. The Mississippi River goes all the way to New Orleans on the Gulf of Mexico.



Source: Wikimedia This file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic](#) license

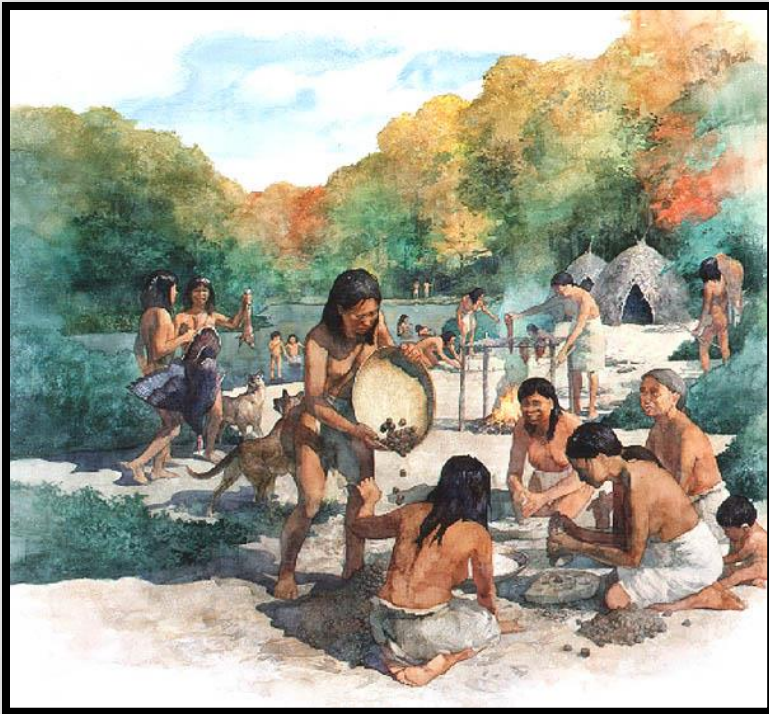
THE OHIO AND MISSISSIPPI RIVERS

- Source: [nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)



NATIVE AMERICANS, EXPLORERS, AND SETTLERS

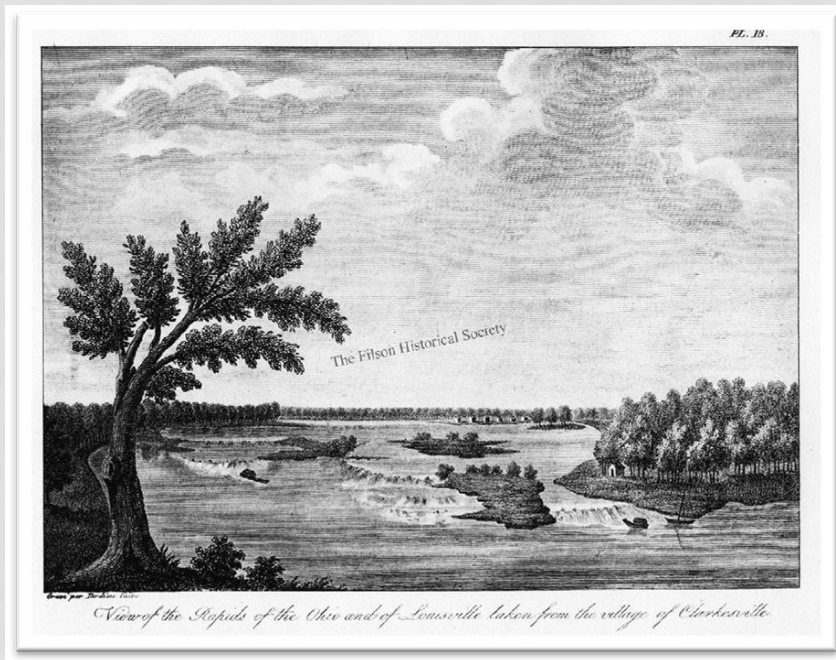
- Source: Kentucky Archaeological Survey



- Many Native Americans lived along the Ohio River and Mississippi River and their tributaries.
- The Ohio River was a natural transportation route for Native Americans and for European explorers and settlers.

A BARRIER TO TRANSPORTATION

- Source: The Filson Historical Society



- The only natural barrier to transportation on the Ohio River is the Falls of the Ohio near present-day Louisville, Kentucky.
- The Falls of the Ohio is a series of rapids.
- Rapids form where the current is fast and there are rocks or other obstacles in the water.

SETTLEMENT BEGINS AT LOUISVILLE

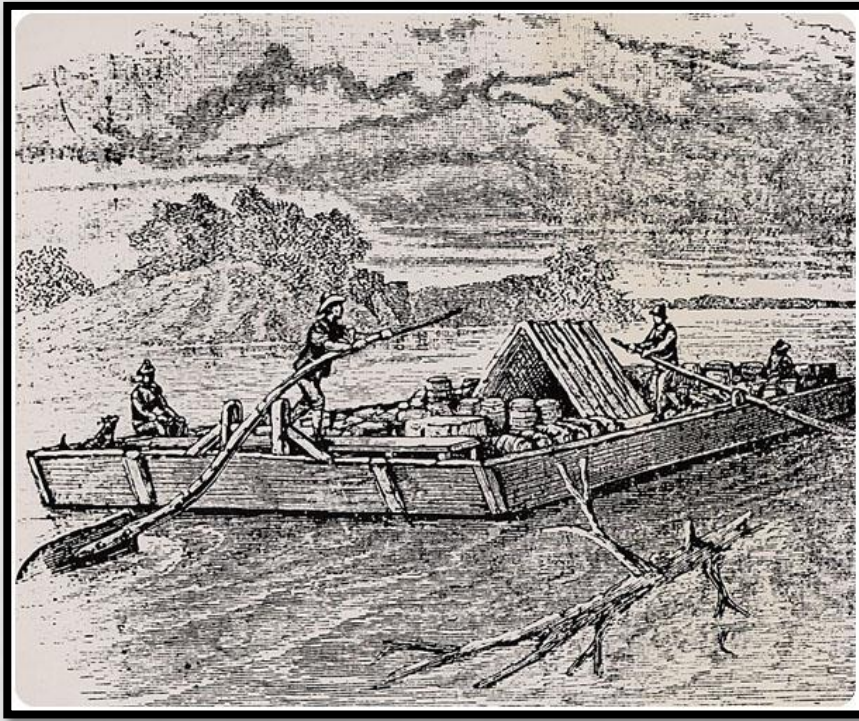
- In 1778, during the Revolutionary War, George Rogers Clark and his band of 200 soldiers built a fort on Corn Island at the head of the Falls of the Ohio.
- That was the beginning of the settlement of Louisville.

• Source: *Historic Locust Grove*



TRAVELLING BY FLATBOAT

This image is part of the Bullock Photograph Collection, ca. 1880-1953, housed at Transylvania University. The collector was Waller O. (Waller Overton) Bullock (1875-1953). The image was digitized in 2004.

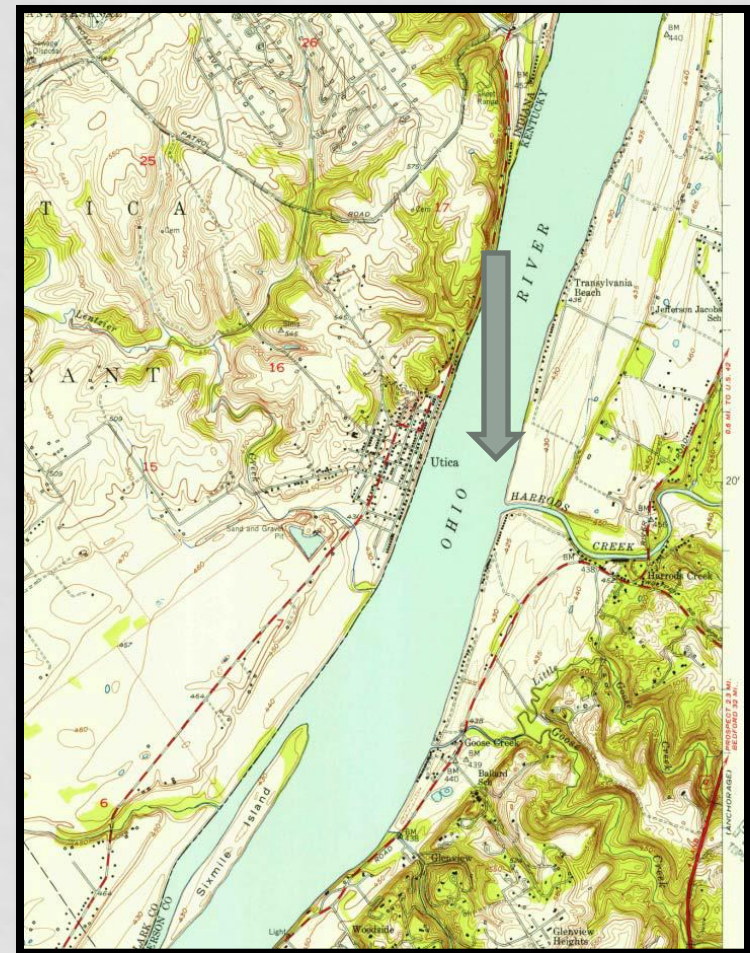


- After the Revolutionary War, many people came down the Ohio River on flatboats. They had to stop in Louisville and either carry all their belongings around the Falls or wait until the water in the river was high and hire an experienced guide to take them through.

LOUISVILLE AND HARRODS CREEK

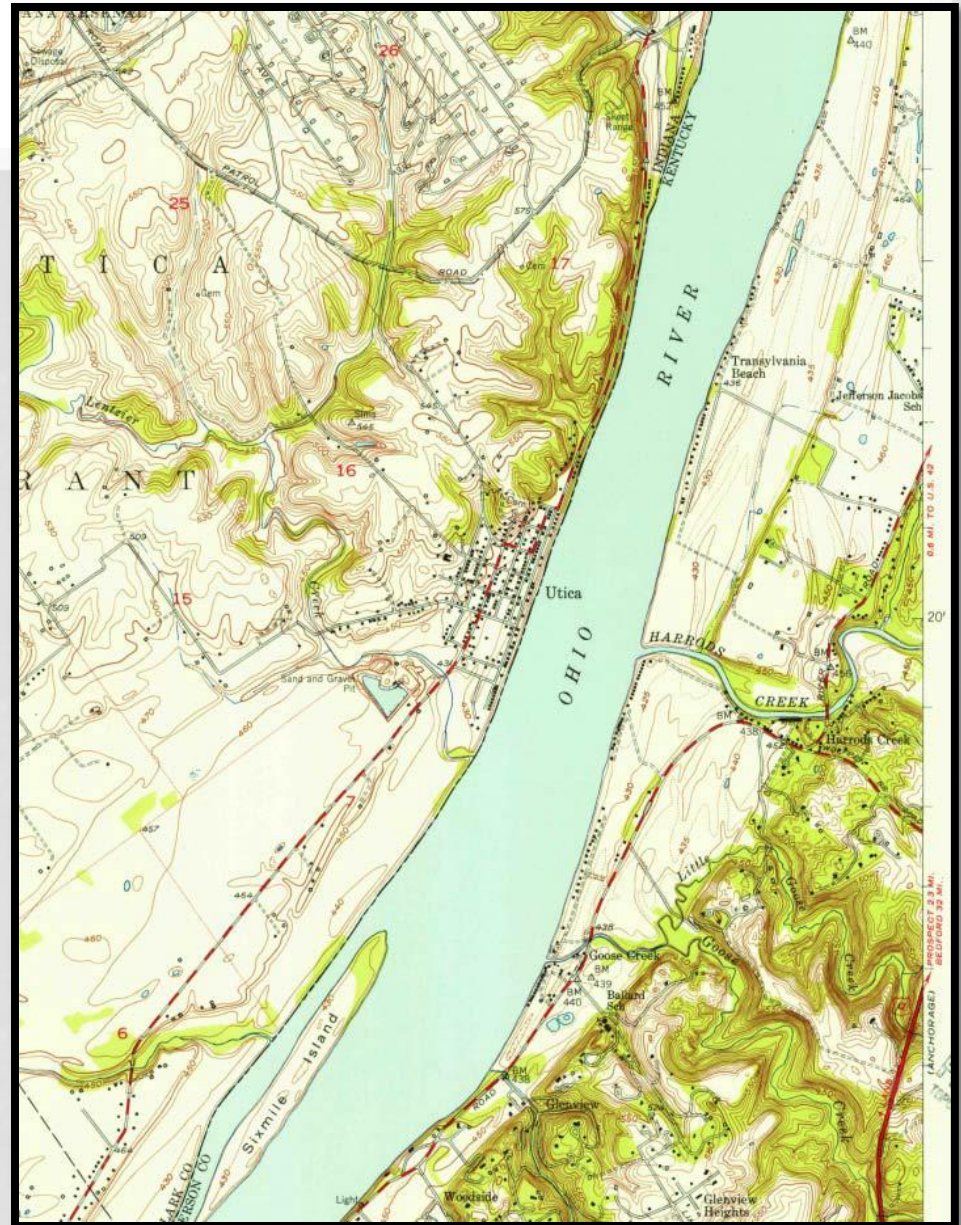
- Louisville grew rapidly as a center for transportation, commerce, and industry.
- Just upstream from Louisville, Harrods Creek formed a natural harbor where it flowed into the Ohio River.
- Want to know what a topographic map is and how to read it? See the next slide.

1955 USGS Topographic map of Harrods Creek



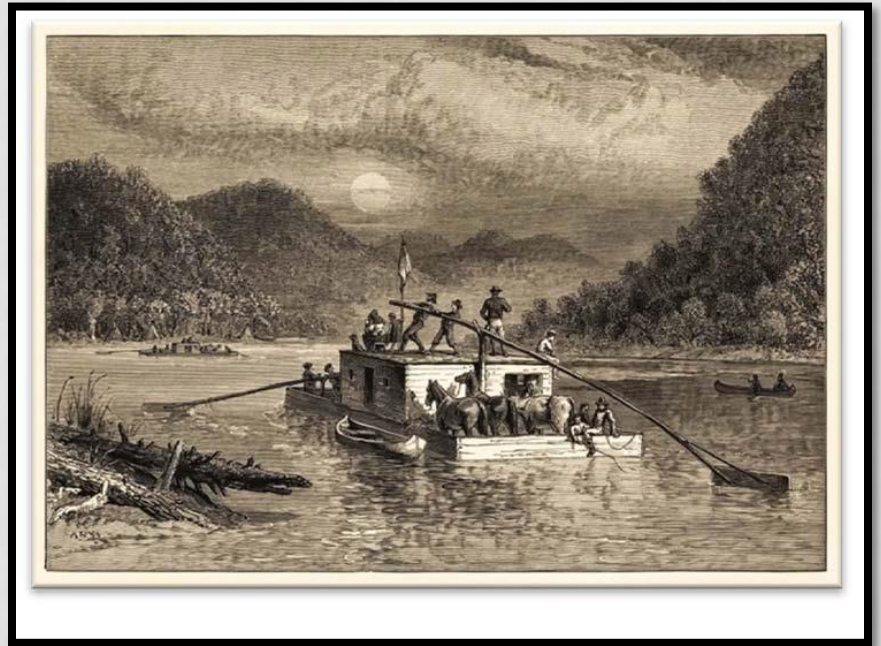
Topographic Maps

- Topographic maps illustrate the shape of the land. Contour lines on the map show you how far the land is above sea level.
- When contour lines are far apart, the land is generally flat. When contour lines are close together, the land is steeper.
- Blue areas are water. Green areas are vegetation (forests, fields, etc.)
- The squares represent buildings.



A SAFE HARBOR

- The free-flowing currents of the Ohio River forced flatboats to the Kentucky side of the river at the mouth of Harrods Creek.
- The Harrods Creek landing was a safe location well upstream of the dangerous Falls.
- Harrods Creek is navigable, meaning that travelers could go inland along the creek, where the rich soil was ideal for farming.
- Settlers began farming along Harrods Creek.



Travel by Flatboat – wood engraving
Artist, Alfred R. Waud (1828-1891)
Source: *SteamboatTimes.com*

STEAMBOAT ERA

- The invention of the steamboat in the early 1800's meant that boats could travel both downstream to New Orleans and upstream to Cincinnati and Pittsburgh.
- The first steamboat reached Louisville in 1811.
- By 1829, over 1,000 steamboats landed in Louisville each year.
- Source: *SteamboatTimes.com*



THE PORTLAND CANAL

- In 1830 the Louisville and Portland Canal Company completed construction of a two-mile canal that bypassed the Falls of the Ohio. With this barrier to transportation removed, the City of Louisville grew even more rapidly.
- As Louisville grew as a river port town, Harrods Creek was growing as a farming community.
- *Steamboats such as the Kilgour bound for New Orleans completely filled the fifty-foot wide canal and locks.*

- Source: Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin



AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY

- After about 1810 most river traffic passed by Harrods Creek to go to the growing city of Louisville.
- Harrods Creek was still popular for its ferry to Utica, Indiana.
- Large farms prospered at Harrods Creek. They raised crops like corn, hogs, and hemp.

- Locust Grove Historic Site
- Source: KentuckyTourism.com



URBAN-ASSOCIATED AGRICULTURE

- Being so close to the growing city of Louisville meant that farmers did not have to grow only large crops to ship to distant places. They could also specialize in fruits, vegetables, potatoes and sweet potatoes, dairy products and hay.
- They could sell their products to the people who lived in Louisville.



Bellevue Estate - Source: Country Estates Historic Preservation Plan

GENTLEMEN FARMERS

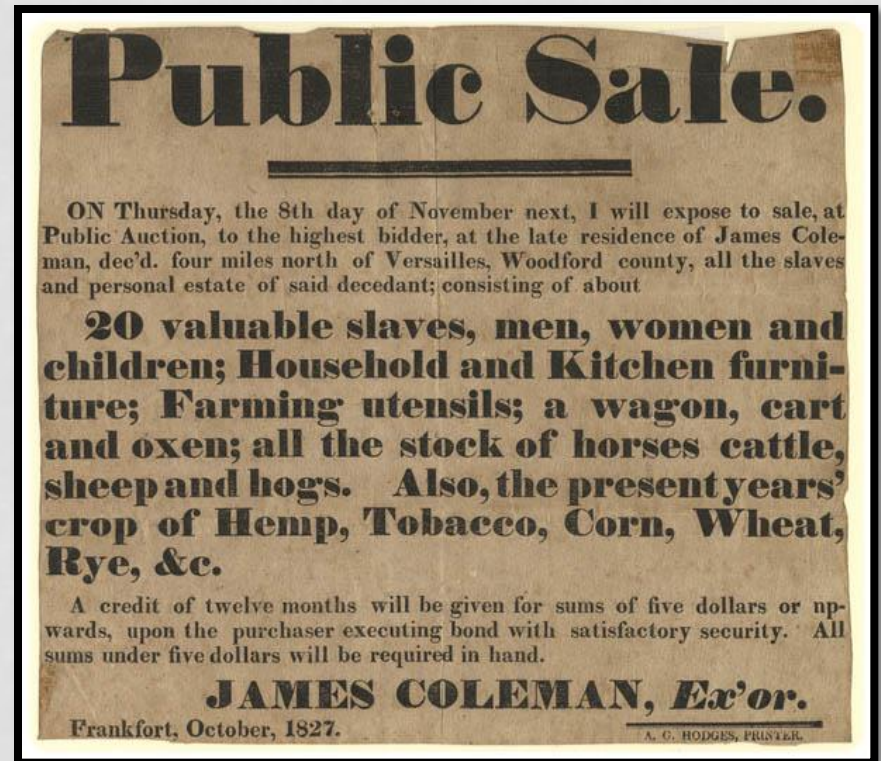
- Wealthy landowners built beautiful homes on the high bluffs above the river. Most of these landowners kept enslaved African Americans to work on their farms and in their homes.
 - Before the Civil War there were 180 enslaved African Americans in the Harrods Creek area.
- Rosewell Estate
 - Source: Country Estates Historic Preservation Plan



LIFE IN SLAVERY

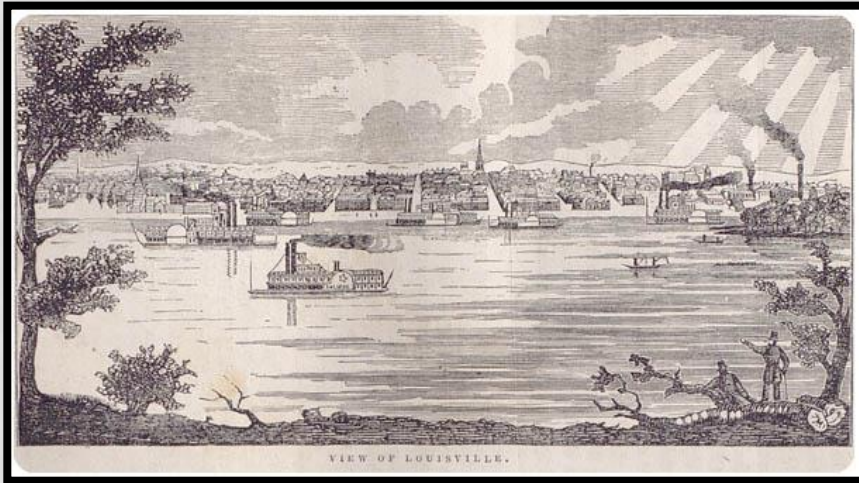
- Life in slavery was very hard. Slaves slept outside or in small cabins with dirt floors. Their clothing was rough and they often were hungry.
- Worst of all, they could be bought and sold like property.

- This broadside is housed at the University of Kentucky Special Collections and Digital Programs. The printer was A.G. Hodges. The image was digitized in 2009.



ENSLAVED AND FREE AFRICAN AMERICANS IN LOUISVILLE

This image is part of the University of Kentucky's Special Collections Library — Rare Books collection, housed at the University of Kentucky. The creator was James T. Lloyd. The image was digitized in 2009.




- Louisville was a busy port. Many enslaved African Americans worked in the city and on the docks. Free African Americans also came to the city to get jobs. The jobs paid very little and the life of the free African Americans was very difficult, but it was better than slavery.

CROSSING THE RIVER TO FREEDOM

- The presence of so many free African Americans and the fast pace of life in a busy port town made it more difficult to keep track of slaves. Many African Americans managed to cross the river into Indiana and traveled north, where they were allowed to live in freedom.

• Source: DigitalHistory.uh.edu

\$150 REWARD



RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of the 2d instant, a negro man, who calls himself *Henry May*, about 22 years old, 5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, ordinary color, rather chunky built, bushy head, and has it divided mostly on one side, and keeps it very nicely combed; has been raised in the house, and is a first rate dining-room servant, and was in a tavern in Louisville for 18 months. I expect he is now in Louisville trying to make his escape to a free state, (in all probability to Cincinnati, Ohio.) Perhaps he may try to get employment on a steamboat. He is a good cook, and is handy in any capacity as a house servant. Had on when he left, a dark cassinett coatee, and dark striped cassinett pantaloons, new—he had other clothing. I will give \$50 reward if taken in Louisville; 100 dollars if taken one hundred miles from Louisville in this State, and 150 dollars if taken out of this State, and delivered to me, or secured in any jail so that I can get him again.

WILLIAM BURKE.
Bardstowen, Ky., September 3d, 1838.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD AT HARRODS CREEK

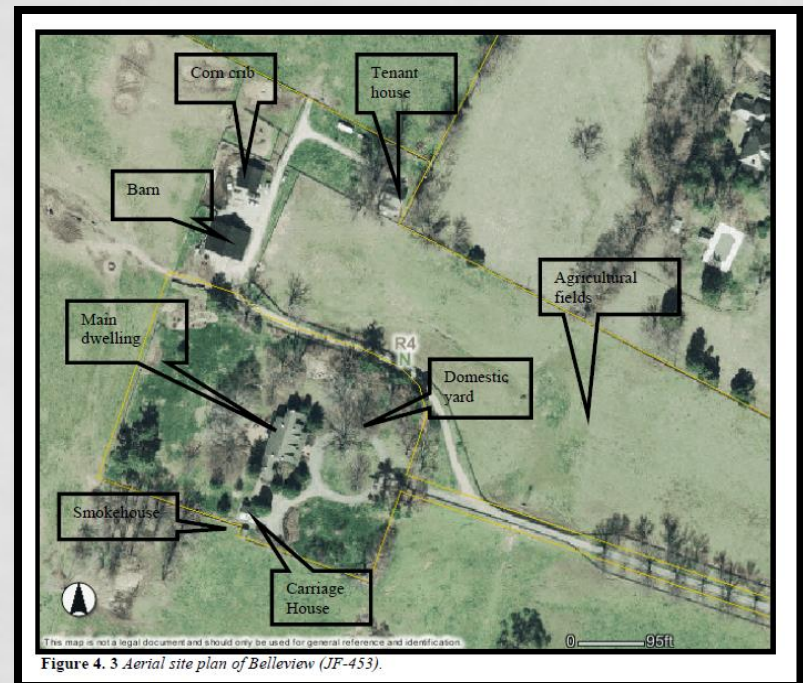
- As in the rest of the country, not all Kentuckians believed slavery was right. Numerous political and religious leaders and ordinary citizens questioned the morality of slavery and were willing to take risks to help slaves escape.
- The Underground Railroad, a loosely organized collection of supporters throughout the country, helped fugitive slaves find freedom in the North.
- While the most popular crossing point in the greater Louisville area was located west of Portland near New Albany, rural ferry crossings east of the city, such as the ferry at Harrods Creek, also provided opportunities for fugitive slaves to cross the river and continue north.

AN END TO SLAVERY

- The Civil War put an end to slavery. Many freed African Americans moved to Louisville, where they could find jobs in the growing city. Wages were very low and living conditions were poor. Segregation was legal, so African Americans were forced to live in overcrowded neighborhoods with poor housing.
- Some freed African Americans preferred to stay in rural areas, where they could earn a living as farmers.

Some lived as tenant farmers on the estates of the wealthy farmers

Source: A SURVEY UPDATE OF BUTCHERTOWN, PHOENIX HILL, DOWNTOWN LOUISVILLE AND RIVER ROAD



AN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

- Others preferred to work on their own small farms. An African American community grew up on the bottomlands of Harrods Creek.
- Around 1890, the Merriweather family bought land on the banks of Harrods Creek, and in 1898 they built a two-story home.
- The house still stands today, a reminder of the early days of the African American community of Harrods Creek.

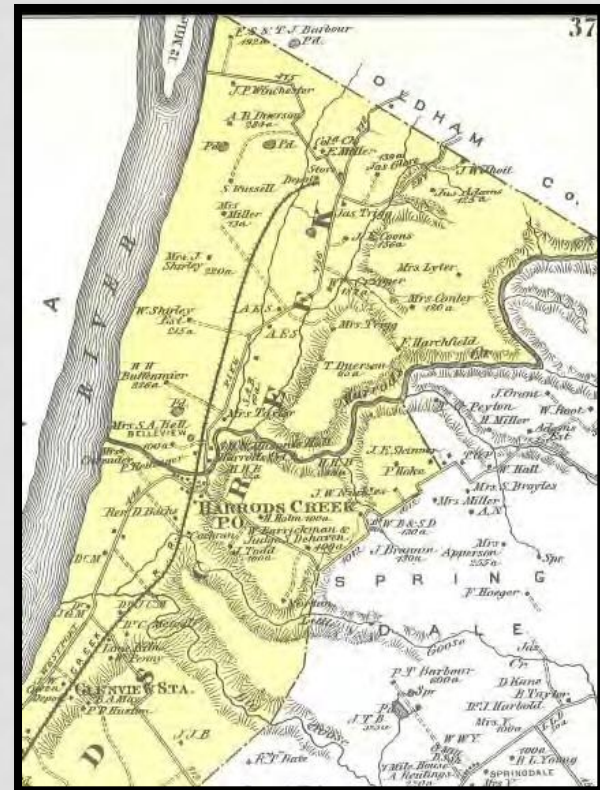
• Source: NRHP nomination form



THE INTERURBAN RAILROAD

- As Louisville continued to grow, railroad lines were built out into the surrounding countryside, including a line to Harrods Creek. Wealthy people from Louisville began to build summer homes in the Harrods Creek area to enjoy boating on the river and other outdoor activities.
- Rail service also made it possible for African American families and church groups from Louisville to organize day trips and picnics on the river and the creek.

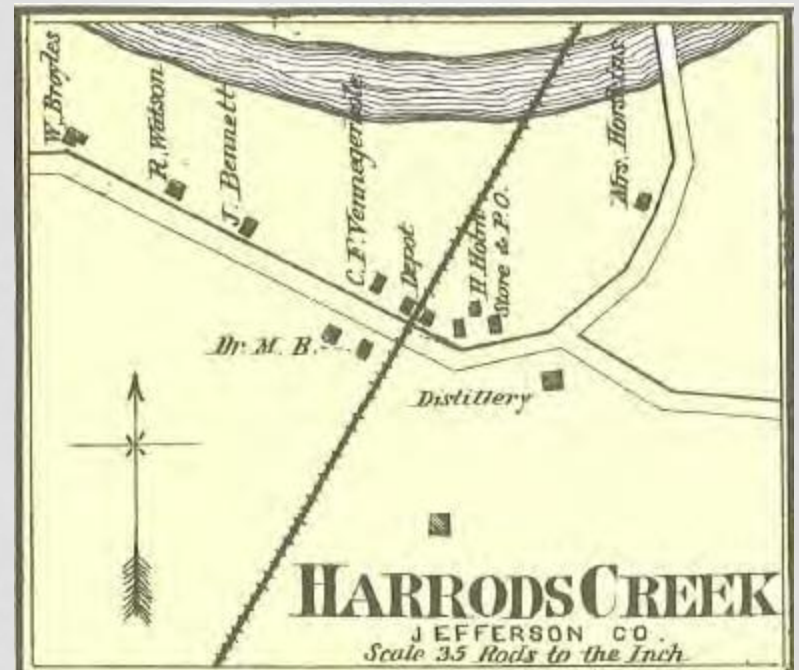
- Section of the 1879 Atlas of Jefferson and Oldham Counties showing Harrods Creek and the Louisville, Harrods Creek, & Westport Railroad



COMMUTING AND RECREATION

- Rail service made it possible for people to live in Harrods Creek and commute to work in Louisville every day. Although small scale farming continued, the community was changing with more commuters and more people coming to the area for the recreation that the river offered. Club houses and tennis courts were built.

Section of the 1879 Atlas of Jefferson and Oldham Counties showing Harrods Creek.



THE JEFFERSON JACOB SCHOOL

- James T. Taylor, a cousin of Harry Merriweather, was born in 1885 in Harrods Creek. He worked as a contract farmer and construction worker. In 1918 he and his wife joined other African American families in creating a school for their children. The Rosenwald Foundation helped pay for the school.

- At that time, schools in Kentucky were segregated and the Taylors and their neighbors wanted a good school for their children to attend.
- Students and faculty of The Jefferson Jacob School, 1927 Source: Ms. Lonsetta Howard



THE JAMES TAYLOR SUBDIVISION

- James Taylor and his wife started a real estate company and bought property in Harrods Creek near the school. They subdivided the property and sold large lots to other African American families. The lots were big enough so that families could raise gardens, grow fruit trees, and keep chickens.
- They wanted to create a neighborhood where African American families could enjoy country living, work locally or be able to commute to jobs in Louisville.



Looking south on Carslaw Court from River Road Source:
CULTURAL HISTORIC ASSESSMENT OF THEBASS-SHIRLEY
SANITARY SEWER AND DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENT
PROJECT, LOUISVILLE, JEFFERSON COUNTY, KENTUCKY

TIMES CHANGE

- When segregation ended, there were more opportunities for African Americans to live, work, and go to school wherever they wanted. Many young people moved away from Harrods Creek.

New people, both African American and white, moved into the Harrods Creek neighborhood to enjoy the peaceful community and the boating on the river.



Source: harrodcreekboating.com

A NEW BRIDGE

- From the beginning, the history of Harrods Creek has been shaped by the creek, the river, and its location upstream from Louisville.
- Those same factors were important in bringing another change to Harrods Creek.
- In 2003 it was decided to construct a bridge across the river, connecting I-265 in Kentucky with State Highway 265 in Indiana.



PRESERVING THE PAST, BUILDING THE FUTURE

- The people who live in the Harrods Creek area hoped to have a bridge that would fit well into their community.
- They wanted the view of the river to stay as open as possible. Planners and engineers who designed the bridge selected a bridge type called “cable-stayed.”
- A cable-stayed bridge is both strong and attractive. It does not block the view of the river as much as other bridge designs.

• Source: eastendcrossing.com



A SPECIAL BRIDGE

- The East End Bridge at Harrods Creek is only the third of its kind to be built in Kentucky. It fits well into the community.
- The river and creek are still shaping the history of Harrods Creek.

• Source: eastendcrossing.com



OHIO RIVER BRIDGE

WHAT ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY?

- Is there something special about the geography in your community that would have attracted early settlers?
- Is there something that would have been important to transportation, such as a natural gap in the mountains making it easier to cross them at that place? Is there a creek or river?
- Are there natural resources like good farming soil, coal or deposits of iron ore that would have helped people to make a living? How do people make a living now?

- Are there any natural attractions for recreation in your community (boating, hiking, camping, etc.)?
- Is your community located close to another place, like a city, that has made a difference in your history?
- Do you think in some ways the geography of your community has shaped its history? How?
- Have people in your community changed the physical environment? Have they built dams, canals, bridges, or roads? What do you know about these structures?

RIVER BASIN MAPS

**CLICK ON A BASIN TO VIEW
AND
DOWNLOAD MAP**



To order a map, call 877.778.7827x126 toll free